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Message Text

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15
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 AGR-03 INT-01 EB-03 COME-00

TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 RSC-01

USIA-04 PRS-01 SP-02 HEW-01 DRC-01 /044 W
---------- 062444
R 092120Z OCT 74
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8708
INFO AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ECRE, SWEL, HA
SUBJECT: TORRENTIAL RAINS TEST GOVERNMENT

1. THE SEASONAL RAINS, DELAYED THIS YEAR, HAVE DESCENDED UPON PORT-AU-PRINCE WITH EXCEPTIONAL FURY OVER THE PAST WEEK. WHEREAS IN PREVIOUS YEARS, UNDER NORMAL RAINFALL, THE ERODED WATERSHEDS, INSUFFICIENCY OF CATCHMENTS, LACK OF DRAINAGE, OVERBUILT SLOPES, AND ANTIQUATED STORM SEWERS MAY HAVE SEEMED JUST ANOTHER GOD-DECREED CONDITION TO THE FATALISTIC HAITIANS, THE ANTEDILUVIAN RAINS OF THE PAST WEEK APPEAR TO HAVE BROUGHT HOME, TO POPULATION AND GOVERNMENT ALIKE, THAT LAISSEZ-FAIRE ON EROSION CONTROL IS INTOLERABLE.

2. TONS OF MUD AND ROCK FUNNELLED VIOLENTLY DOWN 60-DEGREE SLOPES FROM THE MORNE DE L'HOPITAL HAVE TORN AWAY HOUSES, PAVEMENTS, SUPPORTING WALLS, ABUTMENTS, AND BRIDGES, INCLUDING THE KEY DELMAS BRIDGE IN A NEWLY DEVELOPED SECTION OF THE CITY. PERHAPS HALF A SCORE PERSONS HAVE DIED, AND MANY MORE NARROWLY ESCAPED DROWNING. TO THE SOUTH THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CROIX DES MISSION BRIDGE OVER THE RIVIERE GRISE HAVE BEEN SO SERIOUSLY WEAKENED THAT BRIDGE
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TRAFFIC HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN SUSPENDED. THIS IS THE

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CAPITAL'S ONLY USEABLE ROAD LINK WITH THE ARTIBONITE VALLEY,
THE CENTRAL PLATEAU, AND THE ENTIRE NORTH AND NORTHWEST,
AND ITS INTERRUPTION FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME WOULD BE A
SERIOUS MATTER.

3. THE GOVERNMENT HAS RESPONDED TO THIS CHALLENGE WITH
COMMENDABLE SPEED AND VIGOR. THE PRESIDENT, ACCOMPANIED BY
HIS MOTHER, TOURED THE DEVASTATED AREAS ON OCTOBER 5, ORDERED
RELIEF WORKS UNDERTAKEN AT HIS OWN EXPENSE, AND SET IN MOTION
JOINT CLEARANCE FFORTS BY THE ARMY, PUBLIC SERVICES, RED CROSS,
AND HEALTH DEPARTMENT. I TOURED THE AFFECTED AREAS OCTOBER 7
AND FOUND A GOOD NUMBER OF BULLDOZERS, ROAD SCRAPERS, AND
DUMP TRUCKS BEING OPERATED PURPOSEFULLY AND EFFECTIVELY.
TEAMS OF LABORERS AND, ON THE PETIONVILLE ROAD, SQUADS OF
ARMY RECRUITS CHOPPED ROCK, LOADED RUBBLE OR SHOVELLED SILT
FROM STORM SEWERS.

4. IT WAS A GOOD EFFORT, BUT LAMENTABLY AFTER THE FACT.
THE PRESIDENT'S CONVOKING OF A SPECIAL CABINET MEETING
OCTOBER 7 TO DISCUSS FURTHER MEASURES SUGGESTS THAT THE
GOVERNMENT MAY AT LAST BEGIN TO PLAN EFFECTIVELY AGAINST
FURTHER NATURAL DISASTERS RATHER THAN TRUST IN "BON DIEU
BON." INTERIOR MINISTER BLANCHET, FOR EXAMPLE, TELLS ME
HE WILL SOON INAUGURATE A MASSIVE REFORESTATION PROGRAM
ON THE MORNE DE L'HOPITAL, USING MILITARY SPECIALISTS AND
ARMY MANPOWER AS WELL AS THE RESOURCES OF THE AGRICULTURAL
DEPARTMENT. BLANCHET MAY UNDERESTIMATE THE MAGNITUDE OF
THE TASK, AND HIS PROPENSITY TO DEPRECATE THE VALUE OF
FOREIGN ASSISTANCE MAY FURTHER LIMIT THE SCOPE OF THE EFFORT.

5. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, THE RAINS THAT FELL ON PORT-AU-PRINCE
OVER THE PAST SEVEN DAYS HAVE PROBABLY JOLTED THE GOVERNMENT
INTO GREATER AWARENESS OF WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW FOR
THE CAPITAL'S ENVIRONMENT AND ITS REPUTATION. THIS AWARENESS,
IN TURN, MAY INDUCE A MORE REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL
PRIORITIES GENERALLY.
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